

# Drive away bad backs

Advice for mobile machine operators  
and drivers



Mobile machine operators and drivers often report back pain. This can have many causes, not all related to work. But back pain may be made worse by driving for a long time in a poorly adjusted seat, jolting and jarring from rough roads (whole-body vibration) and by manual handling.

## **You can help avoid back pain if you do the following:**

- Check that the machine allocated to you is large enough and powerful enough for the job you have to do and the conditions in which it will have to operate. Discuss with your supervisor if you are unsure.
- Check that the machine has been correctly maintained and any faults repaired (eg a broken suspension seat or defective brakes, steering linkages and suspension components) and that tyre pressures are correct.
- Report any faults with the vehicle or other problems with the job.

- Adjust the seat so that you are comfortable and it supports your lower back and so you can see clearly without having to stretch, twist or lean.
- Make sure you can operate the controls without stretching, twisting or leaning.
- If your seat has a driver's weight adjustment make sure it is adjusted correctly for your weight.
- Choose routes avoiding rough surfaces and, if this is not possible, drive more slowly to avoid bumping and jolting.
- Keep the ground on worksites where the machine is working or travelling in good condition. Remove any large rocks or obstacles and fill in any ditches and holes.
- Steer, brake, accelerate, shift gears and operate any attachments, eg excavator buckets, smoothly.
- Avoid bad postures, eg slumping in your seat, constantly leaning forward or sideways or driving with your back twisted.
- Take regular breaks if you can, to avoid sitting in the same position for too long.

- Don't jump off the vehicle, or make other awkward movements that could jar your back.
- Avoid lifting and carrying awkward or heavy loads.
- Tell your employer about any back pain you have.
- Co-operate with your employer by following health and safety instructions and training.

## **If you get back pain**

Avoid any activities which aggravate back pain. But it's best to stay active, as back pain is rarely serious. Try simple pain relief to help with the pain. But see your doctor if you are worried, or if the pain persists or suddenly gets worse.

## For more information

Talk to your employer, who has a duty to assess and control risks and provide information and training. You can also develop good ideas with others such as your workmates, trade union safety representatives and employee representatives. Look at HSE's leaflet INDG242(rev1) *Control back-pain risks from whole-body vibration* or visit [www.hse.gov.uk/msd](http://www.hse.gov.uk/msd) and [www.hse.gov.uk/vibration](http://www.hse.gov.uk/vibration).

This pocket card contains notes on good practice which are not compulsory but which you may find helpful in considering what you need to do.

This pocket card is available in priced packs of 25 from HSE Books, ISBN 0 7176 6120 2. Single free copies are also available from HSE Books, Tel: 01787 881165.

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06/05

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Printed and published by the Health and Safety Executive